

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Los Angeles, showing a dense urban landscape with a river (the Los Angeles River) winding through it. A major highway (Interstate 5) is visible on the right side of the image. The text "I. Executive Summary" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

I. Executive Summary



The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study considers the central spine of the District of Columbia's southeast and southwest quadrants. The US Capitol and Independence Avenue SE mark the study area's northern edge. Several block east of New Jersey Avenue SE, Second Street SE from Independence Avenue to the Southeast Federal Center and across the Anacostia River to I-295 constitute the area's eastern boundary. The southern edge is defined by the Congress Heights and Washington Highlands neighborhoods, the United States Naval Reservation, Bolling Air Force Base, and Prince George's County, Maryland. West of the study area are the Washington Channel and Marina, East Potomac Park, and Fort Lesley J. McNair. Although there are residential neighborhoods in the study area, most of them north and west of the river are currently used for industrial purposes. The study area also includes New Jersey Avenue SE, the South Capitol Street Interchange with the Southeast/Southwest Freeway (I-395/I-695), Poplar Point, the Anacostia Metro Rail Station area, and the I-295 and Suitland Parkway Interchange.

Executive Summary



View of the new South Capitol Street toward the U.S. Capitol Dome

Washington, D.C. represents the physical manifestation of America's democratic ideals. The Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, and the city's memorials connected by a tree-lined network of streets and parks present iconic images of the nation's political aspirations. These magnificent symbols are particularly powerful when perceived from a distance, as they dominate the skyline and the city surrounding them. Fortunately, these strong elements offer not just beautiful, functional infrastructure that makes Washington great, but good solutions to some of its transportation problems.

There are vistas in the nation's capital that present a very different image. The current view up South Capitol Street shows the Capitol Dome obscured by a tangle of freeway and railroad overpasses. The street itself is a ragged thoroughfare lined intermittently with gas stations, chain restaurants, and vacant lots. A few distressed trees along the corridor are the only hints of green along narrow sidewalks. The state of South Capitol Street eclipses the U.S. Capitol's urban significance as Washington's most prominent building and undercuts its symbolic importance to the nation. It also demonstrates how the neighborhoods south of the U.S. Capitol have been devastated over the past fifty years.



Current view of South Capitol Street with U.S. Capitol Dome from M Street SE



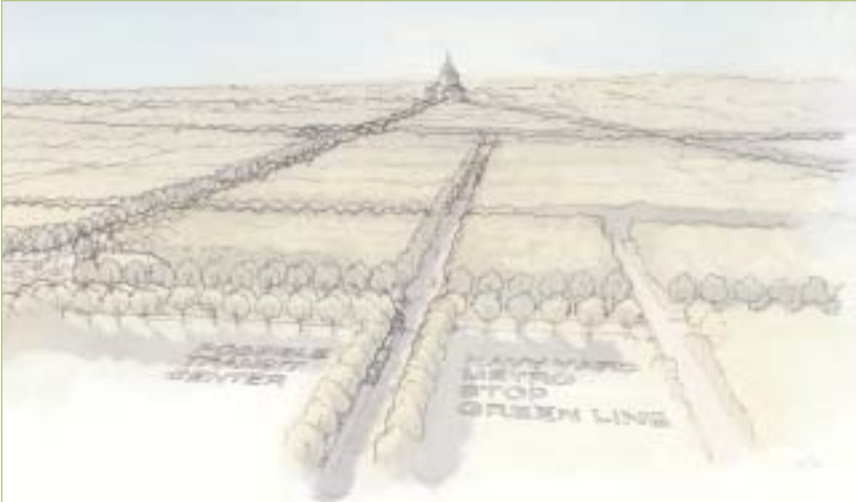
Steel corrosion throughout the Frederick Douglass Memorial bridge structure



Aerial view of the Anacostia River and the surrounding area included in the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative

South Capitol Street's bleak appearance underscores other pressing problems. South Capitol does not function effectively as a local street because its freeway characteristics separate it from the neighborhood. All along South Capitol Street, the shortage of fully functional intersections combined with a long viaduct structure elevated over the neighborhood disconnects it from adjoining cross streets. As a result, local access is difficult and it is underutilized as a commercial corridor. Even though it is currently an arterial roadway designed to handle high traffic volumes, South Capitol Street is jammed during peak travel times. Some of its intersections are among the District of Columbia's most dangerous. Perhaps most urgently, South Capitol Street's crumbling infrastructure—including the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge—is in serious need of substantial repair or outright replacement. This study has identified solutions to these problems and a course of action.

Within months of taking office in 1999, District of Columbia Mayor Anthony A. Williams acknowledged that South Capitol Street's problems were indicative of the chronic disinvestment in much of the city's southeast and southwest quadrants. Even while other parts of Washington began experiencing a remarkable resurgence during the late 1990s, South Capitol Street and its surroundings languished. As a result, the Williams administration has made the rebirth of this area a top priority.



Bird's eye perspective of the Zone of Improvements that includes South Capitol Street, Half Street, and New Jersey Avenue SE

To achieve this goal, Mayor Williams launched the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative in 2000, which seeks to reclaim, restore, and rejuvenate the river and the 2800 acres along its banks. Although the National Capital Planning Commission first proposed this concept in 1997, the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative has fostered an unprecedented collaboration between the District of Columbia government and numerous federal agencies including NCPC. Together, they are working to craft solutions for this long-neglected part of Washington, including South Capitol Street.

Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation have recognized both the urgent problems along the Anacostia River and the Williams Administration's efforts to solve them. Under the leadership of Maryland Representative Steny Hoyer, the House Appropriations Committee allocated funds in 2001 to study alternatives to South Capitol Street's current condition. These funds have allowed the District Department of Transportation to examine how to improve the corridor's aesthetic qualities, encourage multimodal traffic, improve local neighborhood access, and foster mixed-use development. *The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study* outlines solutions to these problems that are both technically and financially feasible.

Within the framework established by the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, this study considers the history of South Capitol Street and its surroundings. It documents and analyzes the corridor's existing conditions. It then provides a detailed vision of how South Capitol Street can be reshaped into a welcoming street that is both beautiful and buildable.

Ultimately, this effort will return a critical mass of people and businesses to the neighborhoods south of the National Mall. Transforming South Capitol Street from an unsightly thoroughfare into a grand urban gateway will help unify Washington's neighborhoods and federal facilities rather than dividing them.



Anacostia Waterfront Initiative study area



Perspective of Half Street SE showing dedicated trolley lines



Underutilized street in southeast Washington near the South Capitol Street corridor

Replace deteriorated Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge with a world-class structure

Transform South Capitol Street from a neglected corridor and high-speed thoroughfare into a gracious urban gateway with the spatial, aesthetic, and symbolic qualities worthy of a world-class capital city. This tree-lined avenue will serve the District of Columbia, the Washington Metropolitan Region, and visitors from across the nation and around the world.

Provide an efficient, convenient, and visually pleasing transportation system that connects surrounding neighborhoods and handles commuter trips with minimal disruption to local residents. Constructing this network will require a fundamental reconfiguration of the current jumble of expressways and streets. This effort will also restore L'Enfant's original street configuration wherever possible.

Accommodate transit, cyclists, and pedestrians by removing median barriers and building at-grade intersections with crosswalks, traffic signals, and roundabouts. Signalized intersections will allow pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders to navigate the corridor more easily. Their traffic-calming effect will make the street safer for everyone who uses it, including drivers in private vehicles.

Goals

Link South Capitol Street physically and aesthetically to Washington's Monumental Core by creating a grand and ceremonial street that will also provide the appropriate setting for future museums, memorials, and other public buildings.

Create transportation infrastructure that will encourage new housing, retail, and other amenities, making South Capitol and its surroundings a wonderful place to live, work, and shop. Such private investment will strengthen the existing communities, as well as draw new residents and visitors to the area.

Provide better access from South Capitol Street to both banks of the Anacostia River, including Buzzard Point, Poplar Point to the north, and historic Anacostia to the south.

Ensure that South Capitol Street enhances both homeland and national security by serving as a central, multimodal evacuation route in case of emergency and connecting Washington to nearby military installations including the Washington Navy Yard and Anacostia Annex, Fort McNair, and Bolling Air Force Base.

Achieve all goals through extensive and thoughtful public involvement, engaging citizens and building consensus in implementing the study's recommendations.



Perspective of South Capitol Street and Potomac Avenue



Current view of South Capitol Street from the intersection of Eye Street SW

- Most of the South Capitol Street Corridor's infrastructure can be transformed into a comprehensive solution to the future's transportation needs by using land already devoted to the existing streets and a new tunnel linking I-295 and I-395. South Capitol Street can become a grand urban boulevard within the existing 130-foot street section, serving as part of a balanced and sustainable transportation system. The network can include transit, bicycle, and pedestrians while also handling current traffic volumes.
- A new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge can serve as both the aesthetic and functional bond between the banks of the Anacostia River. An entirely new design for the bridge will allow it to be lower, more urban in scale, more suitable for multi-modal travel, and more appropriate in massing and architectural detail than the current structure. The new bridge's improved alignment would dramatically improve the vista toward the U.S. Capitol and the Monumental Core from the Anacostia River. The bridge's new location will also present new opportunities for public parks, monuments, and memorials along both banks of the river

Findings

- South Capitol Street will not be an urban gateway worthy of the nation's capital without removing the Southeast Freeway. This will be possible by constructing a tunnel connecting South Capitol Street's through traffic to an artery leading to I-395 west of Potomac Avenue.
- A network based on a 325-foot wide Zone of Improvements between South Capitol Street and Van or Half Street will handle some traffic growth by increasing transportation choices in the network. Establishing this continuous area would accommodate additional transit and potentially an intermodal transfer center. These improvements would handle the increase in trips predicted by 2025.
- Investing in transit is critical to accommodating future travel demands, which will inevitably increase from new development along the corridor. Expanding this system would include increasing Metrorail Green Line trains, improving access to Green Line stations, introducing light rail lines, supporting commuter bus lines, improving local bus services, and facilitating intermodal transfer

- The South Capitol Street/Suitland Parkway/I-295 interchange on Poplar Point can be radically changed to improve traffic safety and improve access to the Anacostia River. Reconfiguring the transportation infrastructure will free up 20 acres of land currently consumed by roadways. This can foster economic development while also creating new opportunities for public parks
- Improvements to South Capitol Street will encourage mixed-use development, both along the corridor and in adjacent neighborhoods.
- Vacant and underutilized industrial properties on the east side of South Capitol Street present numerous opportunities to create a series of new parks and public spaces along the gateway.
- Creating the South Capitol Street Gateway appears not to require the purchase of any private residences because existing street right-of-way can largely accommodate the needed transportation facilities with a tree-lined, six-lane boulevard with generous sidewalks.



Perspective of the west bridge abutment at South Capitol Street, which allows access from the new bridge to the parkland along the Anacostia River



Current view of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge with a concrete manufacturing plant in the foreground

